

**Remarks by Mayor Paul D. Fraim**  
**Poverty Reduction Task Force Organizational Meeting**  
**Thursday, July 11, 2013**  
**6:00pm**

I know you have a busy agenda this evening, but I wanted to take a couple of minutes at your first meeting to offer a few comments about the task force and its work. The first thing I want to do is to say how much I appreciate your agreeing to serve on what I consider to be one of the most important ad hoc commissions we've established since I've been on the council, which goes back nearly three decades now. This is a very high-level group. We know you are all busy people, and so it's important that we make the best use of your time. One of the reasons we put a one year sunset on the task force was so you would know how long your time commitment would be.

I also want to thank my colleagues on the council – Andy Protogyrou and Angelia Williams – for agreeing to co-chair the task force. They are also committed to this effort which we expect will produce a blueprint to guide the community's work in reducing poverty.

The issue of poverty reduction has been talked about on a number of occasions over the years, but this is really the first time we've attempted to examine the issue in an organized way. In assembling the group, we were careful in trying to bring together the best minds to focus on what might reasonably be done to reduce the city's poverty rate. Represented on the task force is nearly every community partner that can contribute to that goal. We have the major private sector employers – retail, shipbuilding, health care and the visitor industry. They alone account for more than 25% of the jobs in the city. We have the major job training and employment organizations, our universities, the community college, the medical school, our public school system and early childhood education, and the faith community, which has a vitally important role to play in helping people make the right decisions to turn their lives around. We have representation from the housing authority and HRT, and from social service providers as well as from public safety and the legal profession.

The right people and the right organizations are now in place and ready to go to work, and I believe the results of your efforts will help begin to lower the poverty rate. This will be an enormously important contribution to the city and one that will require teamwork and coordination.

Norfolk's demographic profile will be important to your work, and it presents an interesting picture. After a couple of decades where our population declined, the trend has reversed and we now have a growing population. Since the 2000 Census, our population has grown nearly 5% to 245,803. We expect that trend to continue.

We are also a city that is becoming more affluent. From \$31,815 in 2000, our median household income has increased to \$43,108 according to the most recently available figures.

Norfolk employs close to 211,000 people, and we continue to lead the region in total average compensation per job which, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, now stands at \$73,874 – an amount almost 2% higher than last year.

In contrast, Norfolk is also a city with the second highest poverty rate in the region. We have areas with high concentrations of poverty and – not surprisingly – we have one of the highest unemployment rates in the region. We are also challenged by lower rates of educational attainment – which is linked to unemployment and poverty – and by a high rate of out-of-wedlock births – nearly 51% of all births in Norfolk at last count and another indicator of poverty as well as a cause.

As we know it today, Norfolk's poverty rate stands at 18.8% for individuals and 14.6% for families. Putting numbers to those percentages, 41,345 persons and 7,203 families are living in poverty in the City of Norfolk. While the recent recession certainly pushed the numbers higher, they have remained fairly constant over a number of years. This seems to tell us a couple of important things about poverty in Norfolk. First, in spite of programs designed to help people complete their educations, programs that provide job training and job readiness skills and programs that provide a range of other benefits, we haven't been able to move the needle much in the right direction on the poverty rate. Secondly, that tells us pretty clearly, it's time to look at ways to do things differently and better to reduce poverty. We need to increase educational attainment for poor, working age adults. We need to become more effective at moving poor Norfolk residents into job training and job skills programs, and from there into gainful employment. We need to find ways to overcome challenges with transportation and with child care, and to give nonviolent ex-offenders a pathway to employment and self-sufficiency.

It's worth noting that we don't expect you to try to solve all of our ills. Instead, the hope is you will focus on how and where we can have the biggest impact. When your work is finished a year from now, I am confident you will give us a clear blueprint that, when implemented, will have a meaningful, positive and long-lasting effect on reducing poverty in Norfolk.

What you will do as members of the task force is vitally important to Norfolk's future and important to our economically disadvantaged residents who will benefit from your efforts. Thank you for accepting the challenge, and thank you for serving the city.